

The Sun 361

Chapter 361 – Currently Busy

After about half a minute of looking at the Spilling Bottle, Julian tipped it over while holding it in his hand.

Nick watched as purple sludge was coming out of the bottle and gathering on the ground.

Julian watched the sludge with interest.

A moment later, one of the mouths moved over to the sludge and opened, consuming all of it.

Nick raised an eyebrow.

Julian was eating the sludge?

A moment later, Julian put the bottle upright again.

"Prephyx Matter," Julian said. "It has a corrosive and poisoning effect. Most likely, the intention behind the bottle's actions is to destroy as much life as possible. It doesn't matter if it's human, animal, or plant."

"Sadly, it can't grow more powerful," Julian said with a confident snicker. "What a waste."

Julian threw the bottle to the side, and it landed perfectly upright on the ground.

"Guess we're just keeping it here or selling it."

Then, Julian walked towards the Containment Unit's exit.

Nick's face showed no reaction, but inside, he grew nervous.

"Is there no use for the sludge?" Nick asked, not looking at Julian.

"Of course there is, but there are plenty of Specters that produce Prephyx matter. In fact, the supply far exceeds the demand, and I don't think that an Initial Hatchling will make a dent in the market," Julian answered casually.

'That's not what I mean, you dumbass,' Nick thought, trying his best to keep his face from showing any of his anger. 'But I can't just directly tell you without seeming suspicious.'

"Oh, okay," Nick said as he also approached the exit. "Who are we going to sell it to? What about the city? There's bound to be something the guards inside or outside the city could do with a small object that can produce infinite Prephyx matter."

The two left the Containment Unit, and as Nick passed by Julian, he saw him furrowing his brows in thought.

'He's never been outside this city,' Nick thought. 'That's the only reason he didn't make the connection. He's never seen the forests or the black sludges before, but he should know about them.'

The two important parts of Nick's statement were "inside or outside" and "small object".

Sure, there were plenty of Specters that produced Prephyx matter, but they were not all portable, and they probably didn't produce as much.

If the Spilling Bottle worked on the forests, someone could literally just dig a small crevice that led into one of the forests and just put the bottle on the other end of the crevice.

Sure, the Prephyx matter was very weak, but after days upon days, it was bound to show an effect.

"I might have an idea," Julian said with a smirk. "If we're lucky, this Specter might be worth quite a bit."

"When's the next big meeting?" Julian asked.

"In about a month," Nick answered.

"Alright," Julian said. "I will run some experiments. If everything goes well, I need you to sell it to the city."

Nick nodded.

Naturally, Julian didn't dare to attend the big yearly meeting.

For the past two years, he hadn't been in a single one of them.

Technically, the yearly meeting only needed an owner and the Chief Zephyx Extractor, and since Nick was both, he could act as both.

Usually, there were two people per Manufacturer in the meeting since they were focusing on different things.

The Chief Zephyx Extractor usually wasn't as involved in business matters but knew everything about Specters and vice versa.

They also didn't want to seem disrespectful to the governor.

Of course, if Julian was the only one missing from the meetings, it would be suspicious.

Luckily, he had already dealt with that issue by meeting all of the usual participants "on accident" at random times.

Yes, Julian's power didn't work on a strong Specialist or Hero, but he also didn't immediately get unmasked as soon as any of them saw him.

He still had his normal body, after all.

As long as nobody was trying to check whether or not he was human, nobody would notice.

So, as long as he met some of them outside for a quick chat, no one would bat an eye.

It would just be some small talk.

At that point, Julian would just give some random excuses about how busy his day was.

However, Julian wouldn't dare to enter the actual meeting.

It was one thing to talk to one of them outside, but talking in a tense meeting with several people who could potentially see through him was dumb.

Everyone in the meeting was already suspicious of everyone else.

Luckily, Julian's absence from the meetings didn't seem too strange since several of the people could confirm that he seemed awfully busy.

So, Nick was the one who dealt with the yearly meetings, and he would also need to be the one who sold the bottle to the city.

Nick didn't ask why Julian wanted to sell the bottle during the meeting, but he guessed that Julian had some kind of plan.

"Are you going outside again?" Julian asked.

Nick nodded. "Yes, the team is still waiting."

"Good," Julian said. "You already got quite a good haul, but we can only get one of the two things we need from the bottle."

The most important thing Dark Dream needed right now was an Adult so that Nick's power could increase without arousing suspicion.

However, there was a prerequisite to getting that.

Having the means to contain an Adult.

The Containment Unit wasn't the issue.

Nick's power wasn't the issue.

The issue was the building.

The building they were in wasn't durable enough for the vibrations that an Adult would cause while attacking its Containment Unit.

Such a powerful Containment Unit was already very heavy, and with the additional vibrations, it would most likely fall through the floor and damage anything below it.

Because of that, they needed a new building.

However, getting such a building wasn't easy.

The city owned every free building and wanted a lot of money for these buildings.

Julian and Nick already had their eyes on a specific one, but getting it would drain two entire years of profits.

Sure, they had enough saved up, but they would not have many liquid assets left after that, which would be an issue.

But now, if everything worked out with the Spilling Bottle, they could get one for much cheaper.

Chapter 362 – Small Slimes

Nick left Dark Dream again and ran towards the bridge.

He had been in the building for barely a couple of minutes, and the guards didn't even ask Nick any questions.

But the same thing wasn't true for the two Experts guarding the other side.

"You going out again?" one of them asked with raised brows.

Nick had just brought back a Specter, and he wanted to get even more?

That was the seventh Specter that had been caught within the last two years, the sixth one having been caught just a couple of days ago in the outside world.

Usually, Extractors didn't immediately run out to get another Specter after they just got one.

"You saw what I had," Nick commented.

"Right. Makes sense," the guard said.

Nick just ran down the corridor and entered the outside world again.

The four Veterans guarding the outside just looked on as Nick jumped into the valley.

As soon as Nick rounded the first corner in the valley, his ability reactivated, and he charged forward with much more speed.

'No one is following me,' Nick thought as he continued.

After rounding another corner, Nick's ability deactivated again, and he grew quite annoyed.

It was another one of the slimes.

'The forest is like four kilometers away, and I really don't want to lure it that far away.'

Nick just charged forward, right at the slime.

Naturally, the slime also charged at Nick.

SHING!

Nick's blades came out, and he immediately cut several of the long arms off.

This slime was barely on the level of an Adolescent, which made it far weaker than Nick, but the slimes were still very robust and difficult to kill.

A thrown spear would just shoot through it, coming out the other side without stopping the slime for long.

The issue was that these slimes had no vital organs.

There was no core or anything similar to that.

Even more, if a slime was cut in half, both halves would gain new "consciousnesses" and act autonomously from each other.

Of course, they were still weaker than the combined slime.

As the severed arms fell to the ground, they turned into slime again, which then attacked Nick.

It was important to note that a slime's arms were the only solid things on its body. After all, how would a liquid arm be able to pull the slime forward?

The arms were also a slime's weakness since they didn't have any other method of movement.

If they wanted to move, they needed to make new arms.

SHING!

But then, these arms would just get cut off again, turning into many tiny slimes.

As the slime became smaller, the arms also became smaller, which made the cut-off arms turn into even smaller slimes.

After cutting off over 30 arms, the many slimes were already climbing over each other, trying to get to Nick.

This was one of the fatal flaws of the slimes.

They could turn into many smaller slimes, but many smaller slimes couldn't turn into bigger slimes.

For nearly a full minute, Nick kept cutting off arms before starting to cut the small slimes.

As the slimes became smaller, their strength also decreased, which also made them slower.

Eventually, Nick jumped about a hundred meters away and looked back.

Nick had been attacked by a slime that was about as tall as him, but now, there were hundreds of slimes that were between five and fifteen centimeters tall.

They were about as big as rats.

And about as fast and strong.

Even if they swarmed Nick, they wouldn't be able to damage him in any way.

Sure, if one added up all the slimes, one would get the same amount of power, but that didn't matter.

Would 1,000 punches of an Initial Newbie be as strong as one punch of an Initial John?

Of course!

If one added all the power, that would be much more power.

But would these punches manage to get through a metal plate?

No.

Would the punch of the Initial John get through?

Probably.

The little slimes still knew where Nick was, and they moved towards him at a speed of about five kph.

Nick just turned around and continued on his way.

After Nick rounded the next corner, the slimes started to slow down.

They had lost their target.

They immediately started to search for more life but couldn't find any.

So, they just started to slowly move in random directions, splitting up.

Some of them would vanish in forests.

Some of them would fall into the Crimson Sea.

Many of them would eventually meet other Extractors with abilities that could actually kill them.

Just because Nick couldn't kill them didn't mean that other Extractors couldn't.

Jason, Petra, and Clayton could use their abilities to turn these small slimes into nothingness.

As long as one could remove the Zephyx that made up their bodies, they would vanish.

Sadly, Nick didn't have that ability.

After about half a minute, he reached the Swallowing Swamp again.

Nick's four Extractors were standing in a group, and when they saw him, they all turned to him.

"Did everything go well?" Jenny asked.

Nick nodded. "The Spilling Bottle is in the last Containment Unit on the second floor."

Then, he turned to the others. "I want to find another Specter. The city has only recently allowed Extractors to go outside again, and I want to make use of that fact."

"By using us as bait," Clayton said.

Nick looked at Clayton. "That is the agreement," he said, "but I will protect you with all of my power."

"I understand," Clayton said with a neutral voice. "It was not meant as a dig."

Nick nodded. "Are you guys ready?"

The group nodded back.

"Then, let's continue," Nick said as he turned towards the north. "I want to take a look at the mountain east of the city."

When the others heard that, they became a bit nervous.

It was possible that there were Specters on the mountain, but that wasn't the scary part.

The scary part was the mountain's elevation.

It was only about 300 meters high, but that was still high enough to see the Crimson Sea.

And naturally, nobody wanted to see the Crimson Sea.

Chapter 363 – The Desert

Nick led his four employees toward the north.

They decided to veer off towards the west for a bit.

The reason for that was the big area to the northeast.

A couple of kilometers northeast of the Swallowing Swamp was the Desert.

The Desert was a Specter that was called the Desert as well as an actual desert.

However, compared to the usual deserts, this one was far smaller, only being about five kilometers wide.

The Desert was an even plane of sand.

There were no hills, dunes, holes, or whatever.

It was perfectly even.

There were also no stones, animal bones, corpses, plants, or whatever.

Every point of the Desert was identical to every other point.

There were two reasons why Nick wanted to avoid appearing near the Desert.

First of all, the Desert was at least an Elder.

Anyone who walked into the Desert would become extremely thirsty within a matter of seconds, and if they were normal people, they would just straight up turn into mummies before transforming into sand that combined with the sand on the ground.

Even worse, that draining effect also worked on water that wasn't connected to any living being.

This meant that water bottles, rain clouds, and even the air would have all of their water sucked out.

Since the effect also worked on inorganic things, the Manufacturers concluded that the Desert grew more powerful by absorbing moisture, not by the consequence of absorbing all moisture.

This meant that the Desert most likely grew more powerful just by having water splashed over it.

While the Desert was not very dangerous due to it not being able to move, its potential was immense.

When Crimson City had connected to the outside world again after two years, they found out that the Desert had grown by about 100 meters.

If this thing continued being here, it might grow even bigger and more dangerous.

Some people had even thought about what would happen if this thing became an Eternal.

Wouldn't the water in the entire world vanish?

The city actually wanted to deal with the Desert, but it wasn't that easy.

The second reason why Nick didn't want to approach the Desert was that there was a high likelihood of a strong Extractor being there.

While the Swallowing Swamp and the Desert appeared very similar on the outside, the worth in the Manufacturers' eyes couldn't be different.

The Swallowing Swamp was just some worthless and annoying Force Specter that produced no Zephyx.

Meanwhile, the Desert was powerful and produced a whole lot of Zephyx.

The only issue was...

How could one capture, transport, and suppress a desert?

One would need to build a Containment Unit as big as Crimson City, and if the city had access to something like that, they would've used it on the Crimson Sea.

Nevertheless, the Manufacturers constantly looked for ways to contain the Desert.

If someone managed to find some kind of core or something similar, they could potentially capture and use an Elder Force Specter.

Force Specters were already very valuable due to the costs of capturing them, and an Elder one would be even better.

The only two Manufacturers not interested in the Desert right now were Dark Dream and Gemini.

Dark Dream wasn't interested since they had nobody powerful enough to suppress and work with the Specter, excluding Julian, and Gemini wasn't interested since they still had to consolidate after capturing the Distortion. One Elder Force Specter was a lot of drain already for them.

However, all the other Manufacturers were quite interested, and there were almost always some powerful Extractors near the Desert, running experiments on it.

That was why Nick wanted to avoid that place.

Sure, many guards knew that Nick and his people were somewhere outside the city, but the fewer people knew of their specific whereabouts, the better.

After traveling north for about five kilometers, the five found themselves at the foot of a mountain.

Or, more like, a very big rock or cliff.

It wasn't a mountain in the classical sense since it wasn't nearly tall enough.

300 meters was a bit small for a mountain.

However, it could also not really be called a hill since it was quite steep and jagged.

Also, it was made of rocks.

So, the city just decided to call it the local mountain.

The entire mountain was probably around a kilometer wide.

Back when the red mist hadn't been in Crimson City, people could see the mountain as long as they looked toward it from an elevated position.

After all, back then, there had still been massive walls around the city, blocking the view.

Nick looked up at the mountain.

This was the first mountain he had ever seen up close.

Yet, it wasn't impressive in any way.

The megastructure of Crimson City dwarfed it.

When Nick looked towards the right, he saw that part of the mountain's foot had turned yellow and brittle.

The mountain was directly adjacent to the Desert, and the eastern part of its foot was already inside the Desert's domain.

Based on the difference between the normal mountain and that part, there was apparently still some moisture to be gained from a stone.

The five of them would need to be extremely careful not to accidentally enter the Desert's domain.

The next moment, Nick led his people to the western side of the mountain.

He wanted to climb the mountain from the west since that meant turning their backs on Crimson City and the Crimson Sea.

As long as they didn't turn around, they wouldn't die.

It was like Roaching.

Nick stepped behind everyone while Jason, Petra, and Clayton went to the front.

Jenny was in the middle.

The three people at the front became quite nervous, but they knew that they had signed up for this.

They were now supposed to do what they were here for.

Naturally, Nick and Jenny were behind the three of them since it would be problematic to save them in case of an ambush if that meant turning around.

Because of that, the strongest in the group had to stay at the back.

Chapter 364 – The Mountain

"Let's go," Nick said from behind.

The three at the front wanted to look at each other for reassurance, but that was quite dangerous.

Sure, right now, the Crimson Sea wasn't looking at them yet, but it was better not to get used to looking at each other.

Eventually, Clayton stepped forward, and the other two quickly followed.

Jenny kept her rifle ready and also walked forward.

As the four of them walked forward, Nick felt his ability reactivate again.

'Means nobody is following us.'

Then, Nick also started to walk forward.

Nick's goal had actually been the mountain from the very beginning.

The Swallowing Swamp had only been a short pitstop for him since he just wanted to confirm if it really was just a Force Specter.

There were a couple of reasons why Nick wanted to look for Specters on the Mountain.

The first was that he was certain that not many people looked at the mountain after the city gained access to the outside again.

Even Specialists weren't safe from the Crimson Sea, and any wrong turn was fatal.

The second reason was the fact that the Desert was directly adjacent.

Since the city was so interested in the Desert, many Experts and even the occasional Specialists were there.

With so many powerful people there, why would they need to send a weak team of Extractors to the mountain?

The Specialists would just look at it from the ground, and that would be search enough.

Maybe some Experts and Specialists also looked around a bit, but that was it.

What if there were a Specter here?

What if it were a Hatchling, Adolescent, or Adult?

Obviously, with only Experts and Specialists appearing here, the Specter wouldn't dare to show itself.

But if there were a couple of Initial Johns...

Nick was hoping that there was a Specter here and that it was desperate for some food.

Sadly, the chances were higher that there was simply no Specter here.

While the effects of the Specters could be seen all over the world, finding weak Specters that were easy to catch was still very difficult.

The five of them slowly climbed the mountain.

Suddenly, Nick's ability deactivated.

However, he had been prepared for that.

After all, the Crimson Sea, which was about three kilometers away from their current location, could probably see them by now.

At this moment, several eyes were probably looking at the five of them from a distance.

Luckily, the five of them couldn't be seen by anyone in the city since the red mist completely blocked them.

The five of them continued climbing.

Naturally, all of them were nervous and even scared.

Nick felt especially nervous due to his ability being inactive.

He always relied on his ability to tell him if somebody was looking at him, and his ability didn't work anymore since the Crimson Sea was constantly looking at him.

What if someone from Anatomy had found them climbing the mountain and was currently preparing to shoot at them from the base?

Sadly, Nick couldn't turn around to check.

He just had to believe that nobody was currently aiming a gun at them.

The five of them slowly ascended the mountain.

They wanted to go very slowly so that any possible Specter had ample opportunity to ambush them.

Nick was constantly ready to explode forward.

While he was willingly using his employees as bait, he would still do his absolute best to protect them.

They entrusted him with their lives, and he would not disappoint them.

As they climbed the lonely mountain in the middle of the wasteland, they looked upward.

They were about halfway to the top.

Nothing had attacked them yet.

All the stone around them was just as grey and jagged as it always was.

Nothing was happening.

Was there a Specter or not?

The answer seemed to be negative.

Nevertheless, they remained vigilant during their climb.

They continued climbing.

And eventually...

They reached the top.

Clayton slowly crawled onto the relatively even ground on the tip of the mountain.

He wanted to be sure that nobody from the Desert could see him.

The others waited.

Some seconds later, he crawled backward back to the group.

"There are three people near the Desert," he said. "Stay low."

The other four slowly continued advancing until they also reached the top.

And then...

That was it.

They were there.

There was nothing here.

Several seconds of silence passed.

"Let's go back down," Nick said. "Keep in mind not to turn around. We have to descend the mountain without looking down or backward."

The others nodded without looking at Nick.

Then, Nick slowly walked backward and grabbed the edge.

Climbing down without looking down was stressful and strange, but thanks to their powerful bodies, it wouldn't be very problematic.

Their descent was many times slower than their ascend, and Nick saw the four of them slowly descending.

His ability was still deactivated, making him nervous.

What if there was a Specter standing right behind him right now?

Nick did his best to remain calm and vigilant.

They continued descending.

Nick's ability would soon reactivate ag-

"AAAHH!"

"DON'T LOOK!"

BOOOOOOOM!

All hell broke loose.

Nick saw four long and thin appendages shooting out of the mountain.

These four appendages surrounded Petra and immediately pulled back into the mountain at insane speeds.

Nick could only see the light of Petra's Barrier shining before she was gone.

The scream had come from her.

As soon as Nick had seen what was going on, he had screamed not to look.

It was important that nobody turned around to look at Petra during this crisis lest they see the Crimson Sea.

At the same time as Nick shouted, Jenny jumped backward, away from the mountain.

And then, she fired her rifle.

A cloud of grey dust had appeared as soon as the four appendages shot out, and it was difficult to see whether or not Jenny had hit her target.

However, Nick trusted in her aim.

Most likely, she had hit the enemy without hitting Petra.

"I'm fine!" Jenny shouted from above Nick. "I can land on my own!"

Clayton and Jason had been slightly in front of Petra, and they had jumped up the mountain a bit to get away from whatever had just happened behind them.

BANG!

The stone below Nick exploded as he shot forward.

In an instant, he reached the grey cloud.

And then, he saw it.

A hole leading into the dark mountain.

There would be no sunlight in there.

BANG!

Without hesitation, Nick charged in.

Chapter 365 – Dark Specter

Nick immediately charged into the dark hole.

The hole was around two meters wide and led deep into the mountain.

As soon as he jumped into the hole, terrifying faces appeared all around him.

They were all laughing maniacally as they tore into Nick's flesh.

Nick tried his best to ignore them, but it wasn't very easy to ignore the sensation of being torn into pieces.

"Petra!" Nick shouted as he landed somewhere after falling for a while.

"Boss!"

Nick gritted his teeth as Petra's voice came from all directions at the same time.

He had no other choice.

WHOOOM!

In an instant, an explosion of light appeared around Nick, banishing the Nightmare's influence.

This was the ability Nick had gained after working with the Blinding Light.

For just a short moment, a picture of Nick's surroundings was burned into his eyes.

He was in a long, wide, and dark cave.

It was almost three meters high and around five meters wide.

Even more, the cave was actually pretty straight.

At that moment, Nick had also heard sounds of fighting from one direction.

Sadly, everything became chaotic again as the darkness returned.

Nick narrowed his eyes and started to shine, but this time, he was giving off a weak light continuously.

It was barely anything, and the cave was still quite dark, but it was enough to weaken the Nightmare's influence to a point where Nick could actually navigate his surroundings.

At the same time, he felt a strong drain.

This ability was not designed to be used continuously, and the drain on Nick's Zephyx was terrifying in relation to how little light he was producing.

The conversion of Zephyx to light was horrible.

Nick immediately charged down in the direction in which he had heard the fighting.

He rounded a corner and heard the shuffling getting louder.

Even though he had only used his light for a couple of seconds, he had already lost nearly 50% of his Zephyx.

When Nick rounded another corner, he deactivated his light after looking at the layout of the pathway in front of him.

The faces returned, and Nick jumped forward with all of his speed.

BANG!

Nick hit the wall at the end with his arms and immediately jumped forward again.

This time, he didn't know what awaited him at the end of the hallway since he had only seen the beginning of the hallway.

BANG!

Nick hit the wall again.

But then, Nick's eyes shone.

His ability had just deactivated!

WHOOOOM!

Nick exploded into a burst of light again, using up an entire 20% of his Zephyx.

In that short moment, Nick could see his surroundings.

About 20 meters away, down another hallway, he saw a man who was nearly 2.5 meters tall.

The man perfectly blended into the dark surroundings, and his black eyes had been looking at Nick.

The man had six extremely long and thin arms with thick hairs growing out of them.

They looked almost like the limbs of a spider.

In the middle of those limbs was a dark, elongated sphere.

This had to be where Petra was.

Nick had seen all of that in an instant before the cave became dark again.

As soon as the cave became dark, Nick's ability reactivated.

This was the effect and purpose of his ability.

By sacrificing a big part of his Zephyx, Nick could create a powerful burst of light with a strong blinding effect.

Nick immediately jumped down the hallway with all of his power as the faces returned to tear chunks out of him.

In an instant, Nick hit the wall again.

That was bad.

After all, he had jumped towards the Specter's location.

It seemed like the Specter had evaded to the side, dodging Nick's charge.

As soon as Nick landed, his ability also deactivated due to the sound.

Most likely, the Specter was right beside Nick.

Nick had to make a decision.

Use up even more of his Zephyx?

Blindly attack but risk killing Petra?

Retreat?

In an instant, Nick gritted his teeth, narrowed his eyes, and made his decision.

He quickly put his forearms in front of his face.

CRKSH!

Amongst all the unending pain the Nightmare was inflicting on him, Nick felt an actual impact on his chest.

Sadly, he couldn't tell how much damage he had taken since he was being torn apart in his perception anyway.

Did he receive a harmless punch, or did his entire lower torso just vanish with that attack?

Nick couldn't tell.

He only knew that he had been attacked by something real.

And that was what he had bet on.

Nick immediately jumped forward and felt something solid, which he then toppled over.

His hands grabbed something.

WHOOOOOM!

That was when Nick unleashed another explosion of light.

Several things appeared in Nick's perception.

The dark Specter's chest was right below him.

The Specter's human but blank face looked directly at Nick with a dead expression.

Several long appendages were readying to strike Nick.

The dark orb that should have been Petra was below Nick.

Lastly, Nick could see how injured he was.

There were three red spots on his torso.

However, Nick could tell that his abdominal muscles were still in mostly one piece.

This confirmed his guess.

'This is not an Adult but a strong Adolescent!'

Earlier, Nick had decided to deactivate his Barrier to take a hit.

Like this, he wouldn't lose any more of his precious Zephyx.

However, if the enemy were an actual Adult, Nick would have been torn apart.

Yet, wouldn't an Adult have directly attempted to kidnap him?

Or what about Jenny?

A weak Adult would have taken Jenny since she had five times as much Zephyx as Petra, and a strong Adult would have taken Nick.

So, Nick was sure that this had to be a strong or average Adolescent.

And by getting attacked, Nick could tell where his opponent was in the dark.

As soon as Nick realized that he had been correct, all uncertainty vanished from him, and he looked into the dark eyes of the Specter.

Chapter 366 – Silk

Nick's ability was still inactive since he was currently in physical contact with the Specter, but that didn't matter.

His blades activated, and Nick punched forward.

BOOOM!

Nick's blade and fists buried into the ground.

Just now, Nick had attacked the Specter's neck, and he was certain that he had just decapitated it, which had been his goal.

Naturally, Nick didn't want to kill the Specter, but something like that wouldn't kill one.

BANG!

Nick felt something hit his side.

With his superior reaction speed, Nick managed to grab the appendage, which could barely move inside his grip.

CRKSH!

Nick used his blade and cut off the base of the appendage, throwing it to the side.

Since Nick's body was a lot more powerful, the Specter could barely do anything to defend itself.

It could hit and injure Nick, but every time it hit its opponent, it would lose one of its appendages.

After getting rid of another three appendages, Nick grabbed the body of his opponent and rammed it against the wall with a lot of force.

"SUBMIT OR DIE!" Nick shouted.

Not waiting for an answer, Nick immediately threw the Specter onto the ground again, putting his foot on what he thought was its torso.

Then, he waited.

Every second, Nick felt like he was being torn apart.

However, he didn't feel any physical impact, even though the enemy should still have a couple of limbs left.

'It gave up,' Nick thought.

Then, Nick searched for the black sphere, which should be Petra.

He found it quickly and felt how soft but firm it was.

It was probably spider silk.

Nick tore it apart and activated a slight bit of his light.

At that moment, he could see his surroundings again.

The Specter was missing its head and half of its limbs, and it was currently lying on the ground, unmoving.

Nick could also see Petra through the opening he had created.

She was unconscious.

She had most likely run out of Zephyx, which had knocked her unconscious.

'It's the silk,' Nick thought as he looked at it.

Just now, when Nick had torn the silk apart, he had also felt a drain on his Zephyx.

Apparently, the silk absorbed any kind of Zephyx.

If Petra were in Zephois, running out of Zephyx for a prolonged period of time would prove fatal.

Not having access to Zephyx was like not having access to air.

Luckily, Petra was only an Initial John, and her body still mostly used food and oxygen to stay alive.

Nick quickly tore her out of the silk cocoon and put her body over his shoulder.

Then, he deactivated the light again since he only had 10% of his Zephyx remaining.

An instant later, Nick took out two wires from his toolbelt.

Those were Zephyx Suppressors, and he quickly wound them around the Specter below him.

"As long as you're nice, you will get enough food and become stronger," Nick said.

The next moment, Nick grabbed the Specter's leg and drag-

Whom.

Nick stopped as the Nightmare's influence vanished briefly, and a weak red light appeared for a short moment.

'What the fuck?' Nick thought as he turned around.

Then, he took a deep breath and shone with very weak light for just an instant, wasting another 2% of his Zephyx.

Nick only now noticed that the walls and ceiling were covered in silk, and he also noticed that they were at a dead end.

This was the Specter's lair.

But then, where had the bright light come from?

Nick gritted his teeth and waited.

The Nightmare was tearing him apart again, but he wanted to know what was going on.

Then, some seconds later, the Nightmare's influence vanished again, and this time, Nick could see what had happened.

A weak red light shone through the silk wall at the end of the hallway.

Nick quickly walked over while dragging the Specter with him.

Shing! Shing! Shing!

He cut through the silk and tore it off the wall.

The red light appeared again, but this time, it was much brighter.

The red light came from a spot about two meters high, and Nick had gotten rid of the silk in front of it.

It was an electrical lamp?

Or light?

Nick had never seen these kinds of lights before since Solace's lights seemed very friendly and warm.

But these lights seemed artificial and sterile.

'But how?' Nick thought. 'These kinds of artificial lights shouldn't work against the Nightmare's influence.'

'And yet, I feel no Zephyx coming from that light, but it still managed to stop the Nightmare for just a moment.'

'I have to know what's going on here.'

Nick started to tear even more silk off the wall.

When his hands came into contact with the wall behind the silk, Nick realized something.

'That's metal, not stone!'

Then, Nick made a decision.

BOOOOM!

He activated his blades again and attacked the wall.

All of Nick's blade sunk into the wall, but it still didn't reach the other side.

This wall was extremely thick!

The next moment, the Nightmare's influence vanished again as the red light started to become bright and constant.

At the same time, an ear-grating alarm rang out.

With the brighter light, Nick could finally see what was in front of him.

A steel door.

The light came from above the door.

'A ruin?' Nick thought.

Nick narrowed his eyes.

He had never come into contact with a ruin before.

It was no secret that there were many ruins all over the world from lost civilizations, but Nick had never seen one.

Aegis was very careful about these ruins, and any information on past civilizations was kept highly confidential.

Most likely, Aegis hadn't found this ruin yet.

Naturally, Nick was very interested.

'But I can't enter right now,' he thought as he looked at the Specter and Petra.

'I have to bring these two back to the group first.'

Nick looked one last time at the steel door before walking away.

He would bring the Specter and Petra to the group, and then, he would take a look at this ruin.

Chapter 367 – Brave and Stupid

Nick turned away from the steel door and ran down the hallway.

Since Petra was unconscious, she wasn't affected by the Nightmare, and the Specter that Nick was pulling behind him wasn't affected anyway.

However, Nick had to oppose the Nightmare's influence again.

Every time it happened, it was horrible.

It was impossible to get used to it.

Whenever Nick came into contact with the Nightmare, he reexperienced the most painful time of his life.

The more it happened, the more nervous and afraid Nick grew of the darkness.

And yet, he just gritted his teeth and did what he had to do.

It wasn't easy, but life also wasn't easy.

Luckily, Nick memorized where he had to go, and he also became much better at navigating while under the Nightmare's influence.

Back when he had swum through the sewers, Nick hadn't been able to navigate inside the Nightmare's influence since he still relied on outside feedback.

After rounding yet another corner, Nick used just a slight bit of light.

By now, his head had already started pounding, and his body began to shiver due to the low level of Zephyx.

Nick saw the hole in that short moment and jumped towards it.

He activated his left blade and rammed it into the stone while he pulled the Specter with his right.

Naturally, Petra was slung over his left shoulder.

Nick jumped from wall to wall, and as he ascended, the Nightmare's influence weakened.

And finally, Nick saw some actual sunlight!

With one last jump-

Nick immediately rammed his two hands into the walls to stop himself.

Cold sweat broke out all over Nick's body.

'I nearly died!' he thought in terror.

If he had jumped out without a plan, he would have involuntarily looked at the Crimson Sea!

Nick took a deep breath to calm down.

"Jenny! Are you there?" he shouted after a bit.

"Boss!" Nick heard several people shout.

The next moment, Jenny appeared over the exit of the hole, looking at Nick with exhilaration.

"Yes, Boss!" Jenny answered.

"Come down and grab Petra. She's lost consciousness, but she's still alive," Nick said.

When Jenny heard that, her eyes widened in shock.

Nick had managed to save her?!

Everyone had expected that Petra would already be dead.

But despite all odds, she was still alive!

When they saw Nick jumping into the darkness, several conflicting thoughts went through everyone's minds.

They had to save Petra!

Jumping into the hole would be suicide!

Nick was insane!

Nick was brave!

Nick was stupid!

Nick valued his employees!

Nick was putting one person above everyone else's survival!

Everyone's thoughts had traveled to both extremes several times.

Jumping into the darkness to save Petra was idiotic and suicidal, but on the other hand, it showed Nick's loyalty and resolve.

Naturally, the three Initial Johns had believed that Nick would protect them, but they had still felt a bit taken advantage of and unhappy.

Sure, Nick would try his best to save their lives, but he wouldn't risk his own.

But now, they had been proven wrong.

Nick had jumped into the Nightmare's domain while running after an unknown Specter with unknown power.

And he had succeeded!

Nick's actions touched them deeply, and they no longer felt bad about risking their lives.

Nick was putting his life on the line for theirs, and it was only right for them to do the same.

"Sure, let me come down," Jenny said as she climbed into the hole.

While Jenny was climbing down, she saw a black torso with inhuman appendages hanging from Nick's right hand.

Jenny had to take a deep breath to calm down.

Coming into contact with an unknown Specter was always scary.

Luckily, Nick had already put Zephyx Suppressors around it.

Jenny took hold of Petra and lifted her out, being very careful that her head never faced the Crimson Sea.

"I'll throw the Specter out next. Be careful. It's most likely a Mid, Late, or Peak Adolescent."

Some seconds later, Nick threw the Specter out of the hole.

Since it didn't have a head, it couldn't look at the distant Crimson Sea.

Nick heard a small scuffle from outside the hole.

As he threw the body out, he also noticed something new.

The Specter was actually missing a leg!

Nick was certain that he had only torn off about three of the spider arms.

This meant that the leg had probably been obliterated by Jenny's rifle.

It had most likely run through the cave by using its spider legs.

"Done!" Jenny shouted. "I have my rifle to its torso!"

"Good," Nick shouted. "I'm not going to come out immediately. I found something in the cave, and I want to take a look at it."

"You found something?" Clayton asked, his head poking out from the side.

"I'm not sure what it is yet," Nick said. "However, it seems quite important. If I'm not back within an hour, you can assume that I'm dead, but I highly doubt that I will die."

The Extractors felt nervous when they heard that.

Nick was going to be in the darkness for an hour?

However, after what Nick had just done for Petra, they didn't dare question his intentions.

"Of course," Jenny said. "We're going to wait out here."

"Good," Nick said before falling back into the darkness.

Then, he charged down the pathway from earlier.

Luckily, since nobody could sense him right now, he was much faster, and he didn't need to endure the Nightmare's influence for long.

Nick had been gone for barely a minute, and the alarm was still going.

Fortunately, this also meant that the red light was shining, which banished the Nightmare's influence.

Nick stopped in front of the steel door and took a deep breath.

Then, he tore all the silk from the door, revealing the entire thing.

On the right side of the door was a small monitor that looked very similar to the ones controlling the Containment Units.

Yet, while the monitors of the Containment Units had unclear and simple displays, the picture in this display was crystal clear.

It was almost like it was a window.

Nick had never seen such an insanely advanced monitor before.

Chapter 368 – Steel

Right now, the display on the right was blinking red, and Nick could see a big exclamation mark appearing and disappearing.

'This display most likely shows the door's status,' he thought.

Then, he looked around the display.

'But there are no levers or buttons anywhere. Can I not operate it?'

Nick put his finger on the display, and he saw it change.

Letters and words Nick had never seen before appeared on the display.

He had no idea what the display said.

Nick tapped the display a couple more times and noticed that dots appeared in the middle every time he pressed.

'It actually reacts to my touch. This is so strange,' he thought.

The dots stopped appearing after they became eight.

'I presume this is some kind of password to deactivate the alarm and to open the door.'

Nick furrowed his brows.

'Yeah, I'm not going to be able to guess that, and there is probably also some kind of fail-safe.'

'Might as well go in the hard way.'

SHING!

The blade on Nick's right arm activated, and he rammed it into the door.

Luckily, since the alarm was already active, nothing surprising happened except for Nick's blade burying into the door.

'This is just normal steel. Maybe it's a bit harder than normal steel, but not a lot more,' Nick thought.

'But it's a lot of steel. That door is probably over half a meter thick.'

'Why would they use that much steel, though? Why not use materials treated with Zephyx? What's the point of putting ten meters of steel in front of me when I can just cut through it?'

'Did they not have access to better materials? Were they that primitive?'

Nick looked at the display to the right.

'No, probably not. That display is clearer and more versatile than any I have seen. Even the displays for the Fog's Containment Unit aren't this advanced, and that Containment Unit costs millions of credits.'

Nick raised an eyebrow.

'Did they not have access to harder materials?'

'I mean, without Zephyx, steel should be the hardest material you can get in bulk.'

'So, did they not have access to Zephyx?'

The more Nick thought about it, the more sense it made.

But then, he remembered what had happened when the Crimson Sea broke out.

Nick had seen a bit of what had happened back then, and Wyntor and Julian had also told him what had happened.

The ruins immediately below Crimson City were made of materials harder than steel, and the ruins below those, which should be even older, were made of even more durable materials.

They definitely had access to Zephyx.

Even more, the entire floor of ruins had been made with extremely durable materials, which meant they were not lacking in those.

So then, why was only steel here?

There were discrepancies that didn't make any sense to Nick yet.

Nick's blade easily cut through the door like it was slime.

After cutting out a circle, Nick grabbed the inner part and pulled.

CREEEEEE!

The entire door creaked loudly and violently.

Right now, Nick's ability was active, which meant that he was 500 times as strong as he would be as a normal person, and his body was already extremely athletic.

One could say that he was 1,000 to 1,500 times as powerful as a normal human.

Naturally, even the extremely thick steel door was groaning under his power.

Yet, nothing actually happened.

Apparently, being that strong still wasn't enough.

'Change of plans,' Nick thought as he put the side of his right blade to the door.

CRRRRRRR!

Then, he moved it down like he was shaving the door.

A layer of steel came off and rolled up like it was cream.

Nick grabbed the roll and threw it to the side before he pulled off another layer.

It took a couple of minutes, but Nick managed to finally get through the door.

Shockingly enough, the door was two whole meters thick!

As soon as Nick got through the door, he was surprised to see bright lights everywhere.

He found himself in a hallway that was brightly lit with lights on the ceiling.

Even more, these artificial lights seemed to keep the Nightmare at bay, which was still crazy to Nick.

Sure, Solace could do the same thing, but they had a Specter.

'Wait, does that mean there's also a Specter here?' Nick thought.

But then, he looked back at the destroyed door behind him.

'Not sure. If they had a Specter, they would probably have access to harder materials.'

'What is going on?'

Next, Nick looked around the hallway.

It was made of uniform steel, which was colored with green and orange colors, creating a certain kind of style.

Nick saw no gaps in the steel except for the doors at the side, which was crazy.

'Did they melt all of this into one? That's insane!' Nick thought.

The next moment, Nick saw something to his right.

He knew what that was.

A locker, and a big one at that!

Even more, there were ten of those.

While the alarm was still screaming into Nick's ears, he walked over to one of the lockers and tried to open it.

Sadly, it was locked.

CRK!

Nick just used more power and tore the door off, which was about ten centimeters of steel.

When Nick saw the thing behind it, his eyes blinked a couple of times in surprise.

It was a suit made of steel!

It was a bit taller than two meters, greenish black, and the face was made of glass.

Nick grabbed the suit and pulled.

CRK! CRK! CRK!

The suit was fixed to the wall, but Nick just pulled the bolts out with the suit.

Then, he looked at it while he handled it like a shirt.

'Is this some kind of primitive armor?' Nick thought. 'I don't think walking around in steel is very comfortable.'

'Maybe it's harder than it looks?'

Nick grabbed one of the feet of the suit and squeezed.

CREEEEEEEE!

And turned it into a thin tube.

'Or not,' he thought. 'Can something like this really act as armor?'

'Were the people of the past really that primitive?'

Chapter 369 – The Ruin

Nick put the suit to the side and walked down the corridor.

When he came to the first door at the side, he found that it didn't have a way to open it.

There was only a small device above it.

Nick pushed lightly, but the door didn't budge.

CRRRRR!

Then, he just put his blade in and cut out a circle.

BANG!

The circle fell into the room, making a loud sound.

The room was also brightly lit and just as loud as the hallway.

Based on the steel shelves, Nick guessed that he was in some kind of storage room, and he could also immediately tell in what kind of storage room he was.

Everything was filled with guns.

It was just that their designs were quite different from the guns that Nick regularly saw in Crimson City.

Nick walked over to one of the guns and held it up.

He had learned how to operate a gun, even though he wasn't using one.

However, he still had to get familiar with this new kind.

After looking at it for a bit, he pointed at the wall and pulled the trigger.

SSSSSS!

The sound of something sizzling came from the wall, and Nick's eyes widened.

A small hole formed in the wall as liquid steel flowed down from the wall!

That thing had burned a hole in the wall!

The most shocking thing was that there had been no recoil or sound of gunfire.

Nick had just pressed the button, and a small hole had appeared in the wall.

Several questions immediately popped into Nick's mind.

'How is this thing so strong?! Even I might receive some injuries!'

'Why would they use armor made of steel when one of these guns can just burn a hole through them?!'

'Why is everything in here so weak while these guns are this strong?'

Nick looked at the shelves and saw 30 identical guns.

If 30 people aimed these guns at Nick, even he might die.

Although, if the guns were wielded by normal people, they wouldn't even be able to aim at him due to his speed.

Nick looked at a couple more guns and tried them out.

Eventually, Nick found guns that gave off the typical sound of gunfire and shot bullets.

But with that came something else that shocked him.

That gun had shot over 20 bullets in just a second!

Nick wasn't sure if Crimson City had guns that fired this quickly.

Eventually, Nick put the guns to the side and left the room.

He walked further down the hallway and entered another door by cutting a hole in it.

Sadly, while Nick could see several steel shelves again, the only things on them were several piles of dust.

Nick guessed that this storage room housed organic materials, which had long since decayed into dust.

The next room was quite big, and Nick saw many bedframes made of steel.

All of the bedframes were covered in huge layers of dust, but there were also some randomly scattered piles of dust in different places.

Strangely, there were a couple of metallic objects lying around the dusty piles.

Near some of them were handguns.

Almost all of them had some kind of metallic tag with text cut

into them in a language Nick didn't understand.

There were also a couple of square objects that perfectly fit in

one's hand.

Surprisingly, one of the sides of these objects was made of

glass or something similar.

It felt very similar to the material the monitor outside the main

door was made of.

There seemed to be no rhyme or reason as to where the piles

were placed.

Nick also found a couple more objects, but he couldn't be sure

what they were since oftentimes, only the metallic shell was

left from the original object.

He left the room after a while and continued down the hall.

Whenever he reached a door, he cut a hole in it and looked at what was behind it.

Piles of dust.

Some kind of crater made of metal.

Piles of heavy, yellowish metal bars.

A big hall with many steel benches and tables.

The big hall also had many piles of dust with items strewn around them.

After around 30 minutes, Nick had looked at over ten different rooms.

And then, he found another huge door at the end of the hallway.

Beside the door were two piles of dust.

However, these two piles of dust also had two of these crazy powerful guns lying in them.

That was when Nick realized something.

'Wait, are these piles humans?' he thought.

Every pile had some personal items lying beside them, and almost every single one had some kind of weapon lying beside it.

'So, every pile of dust is a human?' Nick thought.

The locations of all the piles shot through Nick's mind.

'Could the piles on the beds also be former humans?'

'If so, doesn't that mean that they died in their sleep?'

Nick looked at the two piles beside the door.

'Those two piles are positioned like they are guards. Does this mean that they died while guarding the door?'

'The two piles are very uniform. I don't think they died while

fighting something.'

'Does that mean everyone died without even noticing?'

'Did everyone just spontaneously die without being able to react?'

Nick's heart rate increased as he thought about that.

That was quite scary.

'What killed them?'

'Was it a Specter?'

'Could be, but I'm not sure.'

Nick focused on the big door in front of him.

'This door seems quite important, and if I were to design this place, I would put the headquarters behind this big door.'

Nick looked at the door for a bit longer.

Then, he took out his blade and cut a hole in the door.

BANG!

The round plate of metal fell into the room behind the hallway,

and Nick could finally see what was behind the door.

And when he saw it, his eyes widened.

Chapter 370 – The Machine

There were screens everywhere!

Nick could see metallic chairs in front of big tables filled with screens!

The room was over twenty meters wide and long, and almost everything was covered in screens!

Even more, all the screens were active, and they all displayed different things!

Nick could still hear the alarm, and he could also see that the light in the room was lightly pulsing at the same rate as the alarm.

When Nick looked closer, he saw many piles of dust near the monitors.

Not even the people here saw their deaths coming.

Nick walked over to the first monitor and looked at it.

It was filled with random drawings and words he couldn't read.

Nick randomly pressed different buttons on the display, which changed what it was showing.

After some time, the display stopped reacting to Nick's inputs, and he just scratched the back of his head.

So, he just went to the next display.

'Wait, is that the mountain I'm in?' Nick thought as he looked at the image on the display.

He could see the outline of the mountain and the outline of the place he was in inside the mountain.

The outermost door and the door to this room were blinking red.

'Huh?' Nick thought as he saw that there was a huge room even further in.

Nick looked forward and noticed something.

The huge monitors at the end of the room were not actually monitors but windows.

Nick had thought that they were just inactive monitors since they were just black, but after looking more closely, he could see the outlines of a couple of objects behind them.

He decided to ignore the monitors for now and went to the door at the side, which seemed to lead into the huge room at the end.

Then, Nick saw something beside the door that he was very familiar with.

A switch!

An actual switch!

He knew what to do with that!

Nick pressed the switch.

Ding! Ding! Ding! Ding!

Nick's eyes widened as one light after the other turned on behind the windows.

Now, he could see what was in the room, and he was shocked at what he saw.

It was an absolutely gigantic machine!

There were metallic tubes, lights, and displays everywhere!

Even more, there were several parts of the machine that were actually moving from time to time!

'This has to be the power source!' Nick thought. 'I don't know how old these ruins are, but it's crazy that this thing is still working after so long!'

Nick pressed another button beside the door.

SHING!

And the door opened by vanishing into the wall.

That was when Nick felt something shocking.

Zephyx!

The air flowing out of the big hall was filled with Zephyx!

'Wait, so they do have access to Zephyx?!'

Nick took a deep breath and entered the big hall.

The density of Zephyx in the air was crazy.

Nick decided to approach the machine, and the closer he got, the higher the density of the Zephyx became.

By now, Nick was certain that the Zephyx came out of the machine.

'Is there a Specter in there?' he thought.

However, that didn't seem very likely.

'So then, is this machine making Zephyx out of Prephyx?' Nick thought in shock.

'But that's impossible!'

'Only Specters can do that!'

Nick just looked at the machine in stunned silence.

By now, he had become quite nervous.

'This is too big for me,' Nick thought as the same feeling appeared as when Envy had targeted him for the first time.

'This is something for Aegis.'

Nick turned around and left the room.

However, before he left the big room with the displays, he decided to take a look at a couple more.

Maybe he could learn something.

On one of the monitors, he saw a map.

Sadly, he had no idea what kind of map this was.

Nick also saw a top-down view of this place on one of the monitors.

This top-down view showed another two big rooms adjacent to the huge room with the Zephyx machine.

Most of the monitors just had some indecipherable things on them.

However, there was one with a very interesting picture.

There were many balls on a diagram of different sizes.

There was a huge one in the center, and there were several more balls of different sizes in different locations.

However, there were two balls that were different from all the other ones.

One of the balls was surrounded by a red circle.

Even more, there was a much smaller ball beside the circled ball, and that small ball was marked with an upside-down red triangle with a big dot inside it.

It was obvious that the red symbolized danger or hostility.

Nick just scratched the back of his head in confusion.

He had no idea what this image represented or what it was trying to tell him.

Nick looked at the remaining monitors but couldn't find anything else of value.

'I guess that's it,' Nick thought. 'I have been here for about 40 minutes now. I shouldn't keep the others waiting.'

Nick turned to the huge room with the Zephyx machine.

He quickly made a decision.

'I have to tell Aegis about this place.'

'Although, I'm not sure if this is big enough to call Simon. After all, he's a Protector.'

'I should probably just tell the governor.'

At that moment, Nick furrowed his brows.

'The governor can't be trusted,' Nick thought.

'What if he just keeps all of this to himself and tries to silence me? He doesn't give a shit about the poor people, so why should he give a shit about me?'

Nick looked at the exit with narrowed eyes.

'I can't risk my life like this.'

'The governor can silence me without many issues, but it won't be so easy if he has to talk to someone more powerful.'

'I guess the best option is to tell Julian about all of this.'

'Most likely, he will just sell the location of this place to the governor or Aegis.'

'Like this, we will get some profit, and I get to keep living.'